DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 107 608 SP 009 231

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TITLE A Large School District's Research Training Needs.
PUB DATE Feb 71
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, New York, February 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS College Programs; *Educational Researchers; Inservice Education; Interinstitutional Cooperation; *Professional Training; Public School Systems; *Research Utilization; *School Districts; Training; Universities
IDENTIFIERS Dallas Independent School System; RDD&E; *Research Development Dissemination and Evaluation

ABSTRACT

Of all the functions of the university-based educational researcher, none is more important to public school activities than the training of professionals to support research, development, dissemination, and evaluation (RDD&E) operations. The researcher's job in training RDD&E personnel for a large school district can be understood through the experiences and staffing needs of the Dallas Independent School District. Three factors formed the setting of the school district's staffing effort: (a) the constraint of available fiscal resources, (b) the constraint of priority on use of in-district personnel, and (c) the need for field-oriented RDD&E personnel. In order to deal with the rising need for RDD&E staff, university-based educational researchers are challenged to (a) pursue the design and implementation of RDD&E training programs heavily weighted with field-training experiences; (b) develop RDD&E training programs at the undergraduate and master's degree levels, instead of heavily concentrated in the terminal degree programs; and (c) develop a modular training system expecially for inservice personnel. If large-scale RDD&E programs are developed in the cities, with staff at all levels of expertise, personnel with basic skills could be made available to smaller districts unlikely to hire personnel with terminal degrees. (JS)

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SYMPOSIUM PAPER
American Educational Research Association
New York, New York
February 3-7, 1971

Division H Symposium

"Can the University-Based Researcher Help Solve City Problems?"

ED107608

A LARGE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S RESEARCH TRAINING NEEDS

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It is assumed in this paper that, although the university-based researcher may provide direct services to school districts, one of his functions still is, or should be, training of personnel in research, development, dissemination, and/or evaluation, hereafter referred to aggregately as RDD&E. It is further recognized that this assumption may not universally apply to university-based educational researchers and may not apply to some of them at all. However, even with these considerations, it is still assumed that taking the term "the university-based educational researcher" generically encompasses in the majority of cases either a predominant or subordinate function of training personnel in RDD&E functions.

This paper, then, is directed to those aspects of the work of the university-based educational researcher's job involving the training of personnel in RDD&E functions as they would seem to be relevant to one large school district's personnel needs in the near past, present, and near future. That district is the Dallas Independent School District, which serves the eighth largest city in the nation and stands in about the mid-range of the twenty or thirty largest school districts in the nation.

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It is proposed by thus concentrating on the personnel needs of such a large city district as Dallas that a few somewhat representative needs may be expressed.

RDD&E activities as a full departmental operation are only in the second year in Dallas. The staffing for these activities has grown in a two-year period from two or three professionals to approximately sixty professionals. This represents a major staffing effort in so short a period of time. It is out of that staffing experience and the staffing needs being faced in the near future in a still growing operation, that the following considerations, or challenges if you will, are presented to the university-based educational researcher in his training functions.

Three major factors combine to form the realistic setting for such a staffing effort--the constraint of available fiscal resources, the constraint of priority on use of in-district personnel, and the need for field-oriented RDD&E personnel. Insofar as these three major factors are characteristic of staffing needs in other districts, the following suggestions may be generalizable to the staffing needs of other districts.

First, it is proposed that university-based educational researchers vigorously pursue the design and implementation of RDD&E training programs that are heavily weighted with field training experiences. This is not to say that some few training programs are not already giving considerable attention in this direction, but it is to suggest that such emphasis should be more universally characteristic of RDD&E training programs.

In trying to staff up a new department in Dallas it has appeared that too many of the people available for the position openings we have had

were either heavily oriented to basic research with little interest or experience in applied RDD&E activities or were interested in these activities but lacked necessary basic skills. Both are needed in the same person, and training programs which provide both in the same person would be very helpful indeed.

Another major suggestion or challenge to the university-based educational researcher is that RDD&E training programs be pushed back to the undergraduate and master's degree levels, instead of concentrated so heavily in the terminal degree programs. This is not to say that terminal degree programs are not needed, but budget constraints will not allow all or even the majority of RDD&E positions to be staffed with doctoral level personnel.

It is my contention in offering this challenge that if numerous other applied professional fields such as teaching, engineering, architecture, pharmacy, and so forth can professionally train personnel in undergraduate curricula, that at least a serious attempt should be made to do so in RDD&E training also. Such an approach would seem to have several advantages. First, the supply of personnel with basic RDD&E skills to school districts would be greatly increased. Second, the cost of the basic skills would be less prohibitive to school districts than use of terminal degree professionals alone. Third, young people would be professionally qualified to launch into a specialized, lifetime pursuit in educational research, development, dissemination, and evaluation much earlier in their higher education. Fourth, such a program would allow more depth in training and experience to be built into master's degree RDD&E programs. These seeming advantages are not exhaustive, but they are some of which have come to mind out of our

experience. Admittedly at this time they are hypotheses to be tested; but I contend that they are worthy of testing. Functionally, I know that such trained personnel could readily be hired in our district if they were presently available.

In the undergraduate program, teacher certification requirements could be disregarded as far as the experiences from which I am speaking are concerned. An initial approach could be a double major in the behavioral or social sciences and educational research. It is suggested that such a program include at least as much field oriented experience in RDD&E activities as the field oriented experiences in teacher certification programs.

Another broad area of help from the university-based educational researcher in RDD&E training activities could be the development of modular training systems, especially for in-service training of personnel. A large city district which is attempting to move on a large scale into RDD&E activities needs to give serious consideration to continuous retraining of its current personnel ranging from classroom teacher level through many of the administrative levels. The functional constraint of using as many on-board district personnel as possible in RDD&E activities further accentuates the need for such retraining and updating. If the modules could be developed and empirically tested by the university-based educational researcher it would greatly aid large city districts in staff development for RDD&E activities. It is suggested that modular training packages be developed which take a systems approach to training needs. It is further suggested that such training systems could be more efficiently developed and refined by the university-based researcher than by school districts. To be maximally

useful such training systems would probably need to be systematically developed around detailed analyses of training needs, entry and exit skills required, diagnostic tools for determining these levels of performance, and empirical data as to their relative success in field-testing.

If such RDD&E personnel training programs and materials as herein described were available to a large city district, it would allow the district more realistically to implement a basic strategy which we are attempting to implement in Dallas, that is, to employ a basic team of RDD&E personnel with terminal degrees and/or extensive RDD&E experience backed up in the central office, area staffs, and special projects by a larger number of support personnel trained at the bachelor's and master's degree levels. Such programs would also make RDD&E personnel with basic skills available to many smaller districts which would not likely hire personnel with terminal degrees.

Of all of the functions of the university-based educational researcher, none is more important to public school activities than the training of professionals to support RDD&E operations. Hopefully, the suggestions growing out of one large district's recent experience may stimulate further efforts to improve this basic function.